

Remarks at a Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Dinner in
Chicago, Illinois
May 4, 1998

Thank you very much. Well, first, let me—a lot of things have already happened here tonight that I didn't intend to happen. *[Laughter]* And I feel that I should quit while I'm still not too far behind. *[Laughter]* It's not often that a man in his declining years can demonstrate a loss of hearing, a loss of memory, and a loss of the muscles necessary to play a saxophone all in one fell swoop. *[Laughter]* But even when I was a kid, when I was a teenager and I could play pretty well, there was one unbroken rule that all of us who actually played and tried to earn a little money—never, never walk into a strange place and pick up a strange horn. *[Laughter]* And if you do, always have your own mouthpiece. *[Laughter]* And if you disregard both rules, you deserve whatever happens to you. *[Laughter]* But I had a good time. And the musicians and Shelley covered my sins pretty well. You were terrific. Thank you, Bill and Shelley, for having us here. *[Applause]* Thank you.

I want to thank Bill and Shelley and Jim and all the people who worked on this dinner tonight. I thank all of you for coming. I thank Dick Durbin for his great service in the Senate and for his good humor. I wish I'd written down those cracks; they were pretty funny. *[Laughter]*

Thank you, Mayor Daley, for everything you do. And everything they said about you, I agree with, and then some. I'd like to also thank Bill Daley for being a truly terrific Secretary of Commerce and doing a great job for us. I'd like to also tell you that another Chicagoan whose parents are here tonight, Todd Stern, who served for some time as basically the White House secretary—he organized all the affairs of my life, virtually—has now taken on a huge responsibility to lead our administration's effort at complying with the climate change treaty we signed onto, to try to figure out how we can make our contribution to fight global warming and continue to grow the American economy. We were out in California today illustrating just exactly how we intend to do that. And so, he has done a great job.

You know, I love to come to Chicago. I am so indebted to Chicago—for my wife, for a great

convention, for two elections. I still have the picture on my wall in my private office in the White House where Hillary and I were together at the hotel here in Chicago on St. Patrick's Day in 1992. It was on that night when the votes from Illinois and Michigan came in, in the primary, that I knew I would be the nominee of my party. And I owe Illinois a very great deal in this great city.

I want to just take a couple of minutes—you know, you're all here; you've made your contributions; you're warm; and you want to go home. *[Laughter]* And you had to put up with our music, and I thank you. But I'd like to ask you to leave and ask yourselves, why did I go there tonight, and if somebody asked me tomorrow morning, what answer will I give—somebody I know who had never been to a fundraiser, asked me tomorrow morning why did I go there, what answer will I give? It certainly can't be that you wanted to hear me play the saxophone. *[Laughter]*

In 1992, and indeed, in '91, I ran for President because I thought our country was moving into a dramatically different era, the way we work, the way we live, the way we relate to each other, the way we relate to the whole rest of the world would be challenged and would have to change.

And at every great time of challenge in this country's history, we have always met the challenge by throwing off the dead hand of the past in terms of policies and finding new ways that were consistent with our oldest and deepest values. We've always found a way to deepen the meaning of our freedom, to widen the circle of opportunity, to come together as one country.

And a lot of people said to me, "That's not going to be possible in a global economy. Our country is just going to be pulled apart by all these economic forces moving through the world. And we're not going to get closer together, we're going to get more divided because we're becoming simply too diverse." It's all very well to talk about it, but you've got county after county after county with people from more than 100 different racial and ethnic groups. The school district across the river from the White

House that I can literally see when I walk to work every morning has children in it from 180 different racial, national, and ethnic groups, speaking over 100 different languages, in one school district.

And people have said to me, "But look at this deficit—you're a Democrat, you'll never be able to do anything positive because you've got this big deficit." And I believe we could do better. And for 5½ years, with the help of the two people who just spoke before me, we've been working at it steadily.

So the first thing I'd like you to think about is, we're all very fortunate tonight and no one can claim full credit for it, but we live in a country that has its lowest unemployment rate in 28 years, its lowest inflation in 30 years, its highest consumer confidence in 30 years, its highest homeownership ever, its lowest welfare rolls in 27 years, its lowest crime rate in 24 years—as a nation. And we should be grateful for that.

The second thing I'd like to say is, the last thing we should do is to stop doing the things that got us to where we are in the last 5½ years. The last thing we should do is to be complacent, smug, arrogant, or lazy, or, I might add, small-minded. Because all you've got to do is follow the news, events around the world, events at home—the world is still spinning very fast; times are still changing profoundly. And this is a time to take advantage of the good things that are happening in our country, of the high level of confidence people feel in our ability to deal with our challenges, and get on about the business of moving our country into the 21st century.

The second point I want to make is that we represent a party—Dick Durbin, Carol Moseley-Braun, the mayor, the Secretary, all of us—that is not trying to sit on its laurels and spend a lot of time crowing and claiming credit. We're trying to drive an agenda of change that will see us through to a new century and a dramatically new era.

What is the agenda in Washington today? Our agenda is we're going to have the first budget surplus in 30 years; let's don't spend it until we save Social Security. Our agenda is let's do something to protect our kids from the dangers of tobacco; 3,000 kids start to smoke every day, even though it's not legal, and 1,000 will die sooner because of it.

Our agenda is let's adopt a health care bill of rights. Over half our people are in HMO's; they can do a lot of good, but they ought to know that their choices and their quality is not going to be compromised. Let's provide affordable child care for all the working families that need it. Let's reform the IRS in a responsible way. Let's pass campaign finance reform. In the House of Representatives, our Democrats and a handful of very brave Republicans risked the ire of their superiors and said we're going to get one more shot at it this year.

And most important of all, let's begin to deal with education on a national level, the way Chicago is trying to deal with it here in this community. If it were for no other reason—and there are more reasons—but the most important reason, I believe, to reelect Carol Moseley-Braun for the rest of the country is she has come to symbolize the idea that the National Government has a responsibility to help communities make our schools the best in the world again. She has come to symbolize that.

She started with the idea that we ought to help rebuild a lot of these schools that are breaking down, that we ought to build new schools in the places where kids are being educated in house trailers, that we cannot meet my goal of hooking up every classroom in the country to the Internet by the year 2000 when half the schools can't even take a computer hookup because they're in such desperate conditions.

We also are trying to have smaller classes in the early grades. All that is part of the plan that she and I and Dick and our allies are trying to push in Congress. We also have a part of our budget which would give schools more money to open after school. Most juvenile crime occurs after school lets out, before the parents get home. And we're doing our best to actually get massive help to cities who will agree to do what Chicago has done, stop social promotion and give somebody the authority to make decisions in our schools.

A big part of the problem in American schools today in the cities—there are good teachers everywhere; there are bright kids everywhere; there are dedicated principals everywhere; but somebody has got to be in charge. And if you have two or three different bureaucracies with four or five different sources of funds and people can keep batting the ball back and forth and nobody gets to say, up, down, or sideways,

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you cannot reform a reluctant bureaucratic system. Our children deserve better.

When the history of these schools is written on what is happening now and people look back on it, they will say one of the most important things that was done is they changed the way the laws work so someone could make a decision and then live with the consequences, good or bad. That has to be done. You cannot hope to do it.

But we're saying in Washington, if you pass our budget and another city wants to undertake the efforts that Chicago is making, we'll give you some funds, we'll help you, we'll bring in experts, we'll do everything we can, but you have to take responsibility for your children and your future, and you have to be responsible first.

So we have an agenda. The third point I want to make is, we're thinking about the long-term interest of the country. If you vote for Carol Moseley-Braun and she gets 6 more years—and I'll have by then, after that election, 2 more years—I'll tell you what I want to do. When I finish, I want to know that we've got a huge headstart on the long-term problems that will affect our country for the next 30 years.

What are they? We have to reform Social Security and Medicare for the 21st century for the baby boom generation. We've got to prove we can grow the economy without continuing to deplete the environment. We have to prove that we can bring the spark of enterprise and jobs and opportunity to these inner-city neighborhoods and isolated rural places and to Native Americans living on reservations that have felt none of this economic recovery, so we can say everybody's got a fair chance in America. We have to prove we can build the best education system in the world—not just universities but elementary and secondary schools. And we've got to prove we can live together as one America.

The other thing we have to do that I hope to persuade the American people I'm right about—I'm having a mixed record of success according to all the polls—is we have to continue to lead the world for peace and freedom. We have to continue to expand trade. We have to continue to stand up in places like Bosnia and Northern Ireland and Haiti. And the Secretary of State is in London today working for peace in the Middle East. We have to continue to do these things. And if we're going to do it, we have to pay our way. We have to pay our U.N. dues; we have to contribute to the International Monetary Fund. We can't say to people, we'd like to lead the world, but you pay the way. We're having a little fight in Washington, so we're not going to fulfill our responsibilities. This is an interdependent world, and our success depends upon our ability to be good, responsible partners.

So I'd like to focus on those things. We need positive forces in Congress to do that. The President is not a dictator, and much of what needs to be done requires a cooperative relationship between the President and Congress. So when you go home tonight, you say, "I went there because I'm grateful for what's happened and I support it; because they've got an agenda that they're working on even in this election year; because they're interested in the long-run problems of the country, and Carol Moseley-Braun is the best person to fight for those long-run solutions; and finally, because we love our country, and we want to do what's right by it."

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:05 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to William Farley, chairman and chief executive officer, Fruit of the Loom, Inc., and his wife, Shelley, dinner hosts; Jim Levin, dinner cochair; Mayor Richard M. Daley of Chicago; and Todd Stern, Assistant to the President for Special Projects.

Remarks at the Dedication of the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center

May 5, 1998

Thank you very much. Mrs. Reagan, Mr. Barram, Secretary Daley, Senator Moynihan,

Delegate Norton, Senator Dole, Senator Lott, all the Members of Congress and the diplomatic